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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1925
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1934
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DUSHANBE 002201

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN'S NEW CABINET: PRO-RUSSIAN OLD GUARD ENSCONCED ON SECURITY AND BORDER ISSUES

REF: DUSHANBE 2171

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey Ann Jacobson, Ambassador, U.S. Embassy, Dushanbe, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Despite some pre-election hints that Tajik President Rahmonov planned to clean house in the Defense and Security Ministries, the old guard remains firmly ensconced and has consolidated power by incorporating the Border Guards into the security structure. After winning a solid victory in the November 6 presidential election, Rahmonov had an opportunity to replace Soviet-style thinkers with more progressive officials. Instead, a pro-Russian cohort will continue to maintain a tight grip on the power ministries.

¶2. (C) After a period of strong U.S.-Tajik cooperation with the Border Guards on counternarcotics and counterterrorism, the transfer of General Zuhurov from the Border Guards to the State Committee on National Security may mean less U.S. access to border facilities and programs, and less information sharing and oversight of U.S. assistance programs. With the reappointment of General Nazarov to the Drug Control Agency, our strong partnership will continue to support national and regional counternarcotics efforts. Overall, the new cabinet means U.S. border, law enforcement and military assistance will continue on a working level, but the top-level access so highly valued in Tajikistan may remain difficult within the Defense and Interior ministries and the reorganized Security apparatus. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) This is one of four cables examining the impact of Tajikistan's restructured government and President Rahmonov's new cabinet on U.S. bilateral and regional security priorities.

(See reftel on November 30 government re-organization and cabinet appointments.) The other reports look at economic growth and regional economic integration, democracy and human rights, and the bigger picture of Tajikistan's future.

THE NEW STATE COMMITTEE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

¶4. (C) After rumors that Border Guard Head General Zuhurov had been tapped to lead the new State Committee for National Security, the reappointment instead of former Minister of Security Abdurahimov did not bode well for U.S. cooperation on security issues. As Minister of Security, Abdurahimov

repeatedly refused meetings with the Ambassador and other visiting officials. By contrast, we had enjoyed a productive, open relationship with General Zuhurov and relied on his frank communication and effective leadership to implement many assistance programs. Zuhurov has now been transferred to head the Committee for the Protection of State Secrets. Except for Colonel Tojibaev, head of the Border Guards' International Department, Zuhurov's deputies have been released from their positions. Former Deputy Minister of Defense Major General Sheralisho Mirzoev takes control of the renamed "Main Directorate of Border Troops" accountable to the State Committee on National Security under Abdurahimov.

¶ 15. (C) Compared with the easy access to General Zuhurov, going through the State Committee for Security for all border-related issues might slow communication and create delays in implementing programs. Several key U. S. programs are at risk if our ability to provide oversight and conduct frank exchanges with the Border Guards diminishes as feared under the reorganization. The State Department's International Law Enforcement and Narcotics (INL) -funded salary supplement project, due to begin in 2007, was aimed at revising Border Guard deployment strategies, placing emphasis on the Afghan border while improving the morale and quality of officers and preventing corruption. However, if the new Committee restricts our oversight or access to top border officials, we may need to reevaluate. An ongoing INL program with the former Ministry of Security to renovate training facilities, if it goes as planned, could provide an indication of the newly reorganized State Committee on National Security attitude toward USG assistance.

¶ 16. (C) One somewhat positive outcome of the consolidation of the Ministry of Security and Border Guards could be a freer flow of intelligence information between the Tajik forces, resulting in a synergy of both entities' enforcement capacity and thus

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better understanding and more aggressive protection of the border against terrorists, drugs and contraband. However, the United States would likely not be as active a partner in border activities as we have been in past years, particularly given Abdurahimov's pro-Russian leanings, close ties to the Russian security services, and proven reluctance to share intelligence.

¶ 17. (C) Rumors are circulating that Rahmonov had indeed signed a decree appointing Zuhurov head of the new security committee, which would explain why initial press reports named Zuhurov to the post. However, Abdurahimov supposedly appealed to Hasan Saidulloev, President Rahmonov's brother-in-law, to intervene and reappoint him. As the president's relative and confidant, Saidulloev exerts great influence on policy and controls many key industries and businesses in Tajikistan. If the head of the State Committee on National Security is beholden to Saidulloev, the first brother-in-law could use that relationship to his economic and political advantage.

MINISTRY OF DEFENSE

¶ 18. (C) Minister of Defense Sherali Khairrulloev retains his position, despite initial reports that National Guard head General Rahmonaliev would take his place. Khairrulloev, the former First Deputy Commander of Ministry of Interior, has been noticeably out of his league since his appointment as Minister of Defense in 1995. His focus has been on extracting materiel resources from international donors to build up the Ministry of Defense, which inherited no heavy equipment after the break-up of the Soviet Union. He clearly feels more comfortable as a Russian client and does not really understand the U.S. focus on capacity-building rather than "drop and run" equipment supplies.

¶ 19. (C) Recently, however, he has made some very limited moves towards implementing U.S. organizational recommendations and we can only hope this trend will continue. Retaining Khairrulloev as Defense Minister may be a mark of presidential confidence, but it may also be a sign the ministry will continue to be sidelined, as the State Committee on National Security, Border

Troops and the Ministry of Interior become more important in national defense.

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

¶10. (C) Rahmonov appointed his former Chief of Staff Mamadnazar Salehov to replace outgoing Interior Minister Humdin Sharipov. Although we had little contact with Sharipov, Salehov is known as an old-school conservative and an old ally of the president from Kulob. U.S. projects with the Ministry of Interior work with specialized units whose command has not changed and we will continue to support their training and capacity building. Salehov will probably not object to the training and capacity building for his forces, but may not be an accessible contact. We will need to test the waters over the next several weeks to determine his level of cooperation.

DRUG CONTROL AGENCY

¶11. (C) Although he had quietly aspired to a higher position such as Foreign Minister or Defense Minister, General Rustam Nazarov retained his position as head of the Drug Control Agency, which continues to report directly to the presidential administration. The U.S. funds the agency through the UN's Office of Drugs and Crime and will continue to enjoy good access and cooperation with Nazarov and his staff.

CUSTOMS AND BORDER CONTROL

¶13. (C) Rahmonov's restructuring broke up the Ministry of State Revenues and Taxes, which previously supervised the Customs authorities, and created an independent Customs Service that reports directly to the central government. Gurez Zaripov, former Deputy Minister of State Revenues and Taxes, will lead the Customs Service. Zaripov may have the power to implement much needed customs reform, but the new arrangement may also mean a more direct stream of revenue to the president's administration.

¶14. (C) COMMENT: Regardless of the leadership of certain ministries, President Rahmonov has repeatedly noted that Tajikistan shares the U.S. security goals in the region,

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including fighting drug trafficking and terrorism. All of Tajikistan's forces desperately need equipment, basic infrastructure and improved training, and our assistance programs have provided us entree into the Ministries of Security and Interior that mere diplomatic relations did not. However, we will greatly miss General Zuhurov's solid partnership and direct communication as the Border Guards become an arm of the security service. END COMMENT.

JACOBSON